

Sept. 27, 2015

Dear City Council,

Our City is nationally known for our housing policy, with an outstanding housing director. Given this and the accolades our planning department has received by producing an award-winning Housing Element, now a model for other California cities, it is easy to think we have solved the housing crisis in our city. But we still have 26,000 on our Section 8 waiting list; 23,000 households (four per household—almost a third of the city) in Pasadena in need of affordable housing; and 800 children in PUSD consider homeless. Our housing department alone cannot meet this vast need.

The Inclusionary housing policy that I was part of crafting in 2001, happened several years before we had a Housing Dept and before Bill Huang became Director. That policy enables our housing department to produce affordable housing units at no cost to the city. Passing our Inclusionary Housing Ordinance took a huge organizing effort. This kind of effort cannot be sustained for every new housing policy. We need to start from a place of a level of support within a city framework so that good ideas can be realized.

For the past year and a half we have been asking you for such a body within the city structure. The sustained dialogue to address the complexity of housing needs is more than what can be done in two workshops and Planning Commissions meetings a year (with reports to Ed Tech). We need an ongoing committed body of those who have a vested interest in this concern.

LA has declared a housing crisis. We need to set the pace and be an example to LA and other cities who could be capturing affordable units if they were encouraged to pass IZ ordinances and more. They need to borrow our courage, and we need to set the pace.

We cannot ignore the 13,000 per month new homeless in LA. This affects us as well. We need a Housing Commission that can devote ongoing research and public engagement, a place where landlords, advocates, developers and more can learn from each other and discuss plausible solutions that are win-win.

Some might say that with our City's commitment to count and house the most vulnerable, we become a magnet for even more vulnerable to enter our borders. So do we minimize our efforts and hope that adjacent cities do their fair share? Churches in Sierra Madre, South Pasadena, San Gabriel, and Altadena are housing homeless families through the Family Promise program, but churches alone cannot address this crisis. A Housing Commission can become a forum for ideas and dialogue where neighboring cities could be invited to grapple with these tough issues. Right now there is no place for this kind of focused dialogue.

I became even more aware last week of one more reason for a Housing Commission when we researched the use of inclusionary dollars for the Housing Heritage Partners project on N. Fair Oaks. This is a beautiful project, but affordable to very few people in that community (to qualify for low income homeownership requires \$68,000 and moderate \$78,000). A Housing Commission should offer possible guidelines for the priorities of how our inclusionary dollars are spent and ways that dollars could be leveraged with other City Departments and sustainable goals.

Here are some questions I had after researching the IZ dollars spend on that project:

- If we are striving to be a sustainable city, then we need to make any new projects solar and walkable and with minimal water use. Today affordable housing projects are on the cutting edge of sustainability—with Net Zero projects—developments that use as much energy as it produces. This is the kind of project we should be passing and spending money on.
- Because N. Fair Oaks has 60,000 cars a day, it is not safe to cross this street. Many accidents happen here and I see near accidents almost daily. This project could access dollars from

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transportation to create a cross walk and other traffic-slowing measures—merging housing development with community development and public safety.

- And new all projects should be using laundry to landscape grey water systems, a new program that Pasadena has rolled out. It requires no permits and would again set an example for our dry state.
- Considering that almost all the federal HOME funds and CBDG fund have been slashed numerous time over recent years, we need to leverage our IZ dollars to meet the greatest need. In light of this, here are other questions I have pertaining to how IZ money is spent:
  - a) What percent is now being spent on for sale housing vs. homeownership?
  - b) Jim Wong said that approximately one in six housing units produced by the city are rental—but how many of these are IZ units that do not cost the city money? The greatest need in housing today are affordable rental units. Some state programs allow only 10% of fund to be used for homeownership.
  - c) And what percent of the \$1,250,000 from the Inclusionary Housing Trust Fund spent on the “Arbor Vista” HHP project balance is for moving the Decker house, or is this being paid for with historic tax credits?
  - d) Should money be spent on services? Or all just for housing?
  - e) What percentage of projects should be funded with IZ dollars? Do we spread the money out to more developers perhaps receiving a bit less, and the rest be leveraged by the developer?
  - f) What percent should be spent on new housing, vs preservation?
  - g) How do the dollars spent reflect the greatest need?

To consider such possible guidelines it would take the effort of a Housing Commission or some 'body' committed to the kind of research needed in tandem with the Housing Department's need to have nimble money in order to make quick decisions necessary in order not to miss opportunities.

For these reasons and more, I hope you will support a Housing Commission.

In the 1970's we were close to meeting the need. Only a few years ago the idea of ending homelessness was inconceivable. But Phoenix and the State of Utah give us hope. Addressing the housing crisis is not impossible. Nor is it easy, but it is necessary and the right thing to do. It will take much more that what we are doing now if we are serious about addressing this crisis and realizing our city's housing vision:

“All Pasadena residents have an equal right to live in decent, safe and affordable housing in a suitable living environment for the long-term well-being and stability of themselves, their families, their neighborhoods, and their community. The housing vision for Pasadena is to maintain a socially and economically diverse community of homeowners and renters who are afforded this right.”

Respectfully submitted,

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